1:Layard E-5 (1914-1915) 1942
0012 Malekula 0012

After a time one old man will get up and close the debate by announcing in a loud voice the conclusion that has been reached. The young men have taken no part whatever in the discussion, the whole debate having taken place between the members of the first two ranks.

Position of women.

It is assumed often, on account of the dichotomy between the sexes already mentioned, that the position of women in these islands is a very inferior one. This is, however, only partially the case. It is of course true that they are not held in such high esteem as in the matrilineal islands further north. Nevertheless their position is infinitely better than among the Big Nambas who inhabit the neighbouring plateau of North Malekula. Though in the Small Islands men occasionally beat their wives and white men tell gruesome tales of ham-stringing by jealous husbands, such actions are rare and are by no means generally approved. If matters get too bad, the wife can leave and go back to her own people. If she persists in not returning and has the backing of her own relatives, these pay back the pigs the husband has given as bride-price, and she is free to marry again. But all the numerous minor pigs ceremonially presented to the wife's relatives are not paid back, so that the husband is the loser, even in pigs, and has therefore, if from this point of view only (which of course is not the only one), every inducement to make his wife's lot a contented one. During pregnancy and for some months after the birth of a child she is, moreover, carefully, almost fiercely, watched over by her own people, who at times take possession of the husband's house in order to ensure her welfare. Nor is the women's lot in the gardens too hard. Though she does indeed do most of the carrying, specially heavy loads are carried by the men, and though in the matter of time she is busy for longer periods, the heavy work of cutting down the trees, burning the scrub, and generally clearing the ground is done by men, while in the planting of the yams both share, and it is not unusual to see a husband with his wife and children all busy on the same yam-mound. At home, she feeds most of the pigs, but the most valuable tuskers are cared for by the men who are to sacrifice them. Women also have certain Lodges of their own which men may not enter, and receive complimentary titles when their menfolk perform the Maki rite.[1] They are said also even to perform a kind of secret Maki of their own.

Interior of houses. Tools and other domestic objects.

On the evening of any ordinary day, when no particular rite is in progress, the men and women, after seeing to the safety of the canoes in which they have returned from their mainland gardens, having each taken their own separate paths up from the shore and then shared the

[1] See p. 394.

1:Layard E-5 (1914-1915) 1942
0012 Malekula 0012

translation is "he hands her back to her own Quarter." Here she remains five days, at the end of which time her father brings her back again to her husband, bringing with him a basket of yams in return for each of the pigs which made up the bride-price.

ADULTERY

A woman taken in adultery runs the risk of being killed on the spot, if her husband is so minded, and no one will blame him. Godefroy describes a former form of revenge: "A small pebble of lava would be made red-hot, and used to brand the unhappy woman's body; nine times out of ten, this would result in her death." [1]

A male adulterer is similarly liable, in principle, to be punished by death by the relatives of the outraged woman. . . . As a rule he escapes by payment of a heavy fine to the injured husband, in the form of a tusked boar.

TREATMENT OF WIVES WHO RUN AWAY

As a rule, marriages are stable, especially after the birth of children. There are, however, in the earlier years of marriage, fairly frequent cases in which the wife runs away, either on account of the husband's cruelty, or simply because she prefers someone else. When such flights from the home become more than the husband feels he can put up with, three remedies are possible:

(1) He may forcibly detain her by physical means.
(2) She may take refuge with another man.
(3) She may return to her own people, and, ultimately, a divorce may be arranged.

(1) *Forcible detention by physical means.*

Forcible detention is among the ugly features of Small Island culture, frequently alluded to among white men as a proof of the despicable nature of the natives. So far as my experience goes, such cases are rare, and could not take place if the wife's near relatives were alive and exercised effectively their right of interference.[2] One of the stock stories one hears is that of a man hamstringing his wife. Godefroy records yet another method:

"Rorin-mal is well known for his ungovernable temper; he has two wives, Le-mbe and Le-rak-rak, each of whom is jealous of the other. When Le-mbe is in the ascendant, Le-rak-rak sulks and disappears for days. Last year Rorin-mal, tired of her continued flights, resolved on a method of obtaining, with regard to her, a few months' peace. Unwinding a roll of plaited coconut sinnet, he seized her, tied her hands

[1] Godefroy, 1, 1933, p. 127.

[2] See p. 175.

1:Layard E-5 (1914-1915) 1942
0012 Malekula 0012

586 684 behind her back, and in this way suspended her from the ridge-pole of her house. Then, tying her knees together, he lit a fire under her feet. Her agonised cries brought the neighbours running to see what had happened. The husband was in no way put out by the publicity, and, just as methodically as he would roast the side of a pig, proceeded to roast her knees after he had finished with her feet. . . . Then he sat down on a stone and lit a cigarette . . . saying, 'She is always running away, and I have no other means of putting a stop to it.' . . . But he allowed her own relatives to put an end to her sufferings by tending to the sores made by the fire." [1]

Such cases, as I have said, are rare, though mild chastisement, such as beating or throwing stones, is common and is not regarded as of public concern.

586 (2) *The wife places herself under the protection of one of her husband's relatives.*

An intermediate stage between successful maltreatment and straightforward divorce is illustrated by the following type of scene, which is somewhat less rare:

"Owing to some domestic quarrel, a woman has taken flight from the conjugal hearth. For several days she wanders from clan to clan; in the morning she may be seen sitting on the sea-shore, wild eyed and sullen; towards evening she may be observed standing on the reef seeking shellfish with which to satisfy her hunger at nightfall. Everyone on the island knows that she has had a disagreement with her husband and has run away. One of her husband's near relatives may decide to shelter her. In such a case he will approach her in a friendly way and say, 'Come with me; come into my enclosure.' If the woman is willing, she makes her way to her protector's house. From the moment she gets there, she starts helping the woman whose consort she will henceforward be. Everyone says, '*Meltek mo tuka*,' 'Meltek [2] has taken her, for himself.'

"For the first few months that she spends in his enclosure Meltek will not touch her; he will confine his attentions to caring for her and treating her as the friend of his legitimate wife. After a time, it becomes necessary for the situation to be cleared up. The two men meet: if they prove reasonable, matters are amicably arranged. On the one hand, Meltek, on receiving compensation for his trouble, may return the woman to her rightful owner. On the other hand, if the husband is tired of his wife's flights, or if in the end her protector is so disposed, then

[1] Godefroy, 1, 1933, pp. 126-7. Speiser (1, p. 70), who visited the island before Godefroy, mentions a similar case. Many such stories can be traced back to a single exceptional incident. Godefroy hastens to add: "Very different is the case of Melteronge. He also has bought two wives. Since they are both sweet-tempered and peaceful, he lives in peace with both of them and with the eight children they have presented to him."

[2] A Maki title (see p. 289) held by most adult men.

1:Layard E-5 (1914-1915) 1942
OO12 Malekula OO12

a divorce will be arranged, and Meltek, having paid an agreed sum in pigs, finds himself 'at the head' of a second wife." [1]

(3) *She runs home to her own people.*

The most usual solution of marital troubles between young people is for the young wife to run home repeatedly to her own people, resulting, if she persists, in divorce, though sometimes even this may lead to fighting, as seen on p. 613.

DIFFICULTIES WITH OVER-GRASPING PARENTS-IN-LAW

In addition to the motives for divorce stated above there is another, from the husband's side, namely the burden of unreasonable or over-grasping parents-in-law. One of the everlasting complaints of all Small Island natives is the permanent state of indebtedness in which a man stands towards his wife's parents. He not only pays them a huge sum in pigs and mats as bride-price. He also pays for his betrothal, for each child at birth and later to "buy it back" [2] from its maternal relatives. He is, moreover, obliged to present his wife's parents or brother with tusked boars of considerable value at every rite that either he or they perform. This obligation, based on the recognition of matrilineal descent which the existing emphasis on overt patrilineal descent has by no means overcome, is looked on by the natives as one of those galling tricks of fate which it is impossible to escape. The fact that he is assisted, particularly with regard to betrothal and bride-price, by his clansmen is no comfort, since he in turn, when they marry, must assist them. The consequent eternal borrowing of and trading for pigs creates wheels within wheels of indebtedness and the reverse, detailed accounts of which will be given in future volumes. Since pig currency differs from most other forms of currency in that the pig is an animal which may or may not grow longer and longer tusks, and since, however exactly graded, the grades merge into one another by slow growth, the latitude for bargaining and misunderstandings is very great. It thus comes about that the claims of the wife's parents may be just bearable, or they may be so grasping as to make the burden of a man's obligation even more than the best wife is worth. In this case, in order to get rid, not of his wife, but of her people, he may seek a divorce.

DIVORCE

The procedure for divorce is, theoretically, simple, involving nothing more complicated than the return of the bride-price to the aggrieved husband. But in fact the dice are heavily loaded against the husband. In the

[1] Godefroy, 1, 1933, pp. 125-6.

[2] See p. 178.

1:Layard E-5 (1914-1915) 1942
0012 Malekula 0012

586 first place, if he does recover the whole bride-price, he loses the "interest" on it in the form of the amount that the pigs paid would in the meantime have grown. In the second place, there is no hope of the return of the pigs paid for betrothal. In the third place, though it is true that the wife's parents make counter-presentations in return for those made by the son-in-law during the various Maki and other rites, these counter-presents in no way equal those which they receive, and the balance is never repaid. In the fourth place, the bride-price, though theoretically repaid in full, is as a rule only paid back in part, the pigs composing it having been divided among her paternal relatives, who see no reason why they should return them.

So, though divorce is easy, it is an expensive matter, involving such loss in pigs that a man thinks more than twice before he goes in for it, and its occurrence after the birth of a child is rare.[1]

[1] Godefroy (1, 1933, pp. 109-14) cites several cases of divorce with particular reference to the reactions involved between the matrilineal and patrilineal elements in the kinship system. These are, however, recent cases complicated by the incipient breakdown of the kinship system due to white influence among missionised natives, and are the only ethnological material published by Godefroy which is not included in this work.